

Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy

2011-2012 Policy Agenda

Our Mission: Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy strengthens the collective efforts of land conservancies and organizations dedicated to the conservation of Michigan's environmentally and economically significant lands. Heart of the Lakes provides leadership, innovative ideas, and advocates for smart public policy for the benefit of our communities and for generations to come.

Heart of the Lakes anticipates focusing on the following policy priorities in 2011-2012 in addition to emerging issues core to our mission and in the interest of Michigan land conservancies:

- Continue protection of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust fund and explore continued or new application of future oil and gas revenues to conservation purposes.
 - Work with the new administration and MNRTF board and staff to offer recommendations as a new strategic approach to improve the efficacy of the Trust Fund is developed.
 - Advocate for swift passage of appropriations legislation for MNRTF grants to ensure funds are distributed quickly
- Generate novel approaches to state funding streams for farmland preservation and continue to advocate for federal Farm and Ranch lands Protection Program funding allocation for Michigan projects.
 - Work with Michigan Department of Agriculture, Michigan Farm Bureau, and legislators to reintroduce PA116 reform bills
 - Explore new funding mechanisms for the State Agriculture Preservation Program to fund local Purchase of Development Rights programs
 - Explore new local match sources so that local farmland protection programs are able to take full advantage of federal farmland protection funding
- Ensure that Michigan land conservancies remain eligible for real property tax exemption.
 - Advocate for passage of legislation that appropriately clarifies subsection 5 of the General Property Tax Act (MCL 211.7o), but does not limit property tax exemption for conservancies to that section only.

1. The first part of the document is a letter from the President of the United States to the Congress.

2. The second part is a report from the Secretary of the Treasury.

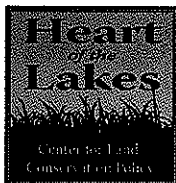
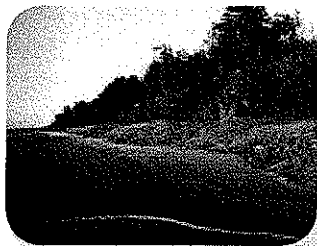
3. The third part is a report from the Secretary of the Interior. The report contains a list of the lands owned by the United States, and a description of the lands that are available for sale. The report also contains a list of the lands that are reserved for the use of the Indians.

4. The fourth part is a report from the Secretary of the War. The report contains a list of the troops that are in the service of the United States, and a description of the arms and equipment that are in the possession of the troops.

5. The fifth part is a report from the Secretary of the Navy. The report contains a list of the ships that are in the service of the United States, and a description of the arms and equipment that are in the possession of the ships. The report also contains a list of the lands that are owned by the United States, and a description of the lands that are available for sale.

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Michigan Land Conservancies

Permanently Protecting Natural Resources

Michigan land conservancies are nonprofit organizations that help families and communities protect natural and working lands forever. Land conservancies are uniquely well situated, using voluntary, market-based tools to protect land and safeguard Michigan's natural beauty and the conservation values of our most important lands.



Private and Public Lands

Land conservancies also permanently protect lands that provide public access opportunities to nature preserves and sanctuaries in some of Michigan's most beautiful places. Conservancies engage thousands of generous volunteers and landowners in stewardship activities to maintain the conservation values of the lands they help to protect.



Benefiting Our Entire State

Today, Michigan land conservancies have worked with hundreds of landowners to protect over one-half million acres of natural and working lands. Land conservancies understand that thoughtful land protection enriches lives, secures cherished places, and meets vital needs for all people of the state including:

- Clean water and air
- Safe and abundant local foods
- Healthy and diverse wildlife populations
- Sustainable working forests
- Equitable access to some of Michigan's most cherished places



Clear Conservation Priorities

Conservancies regularly help landowners protect areas with specific land cover types for their biological, social, and recreational value as well as for the ecosystem services they provide (e.g. groundwater recharge and filtration, improved air quality, pollination that sustains biodiversity and food production). These land cover types include the following:

- Lands that directly affect watershed health and impact water quality
- Large, connected areas of farmland harboring productive soils and wildlife habitat
- Areas of scenic or recreational value
- Areas of high connectivity that increase existing areas of unfragmented natural or working lands
- Areas of high biodiversity that are representative of Michigan's native plants and animals
- Habitat that supports state and federal threatened and endangered species or increases preservation of a fundamental ecosystem function



Michigan Land Conservancies: Stronger Together

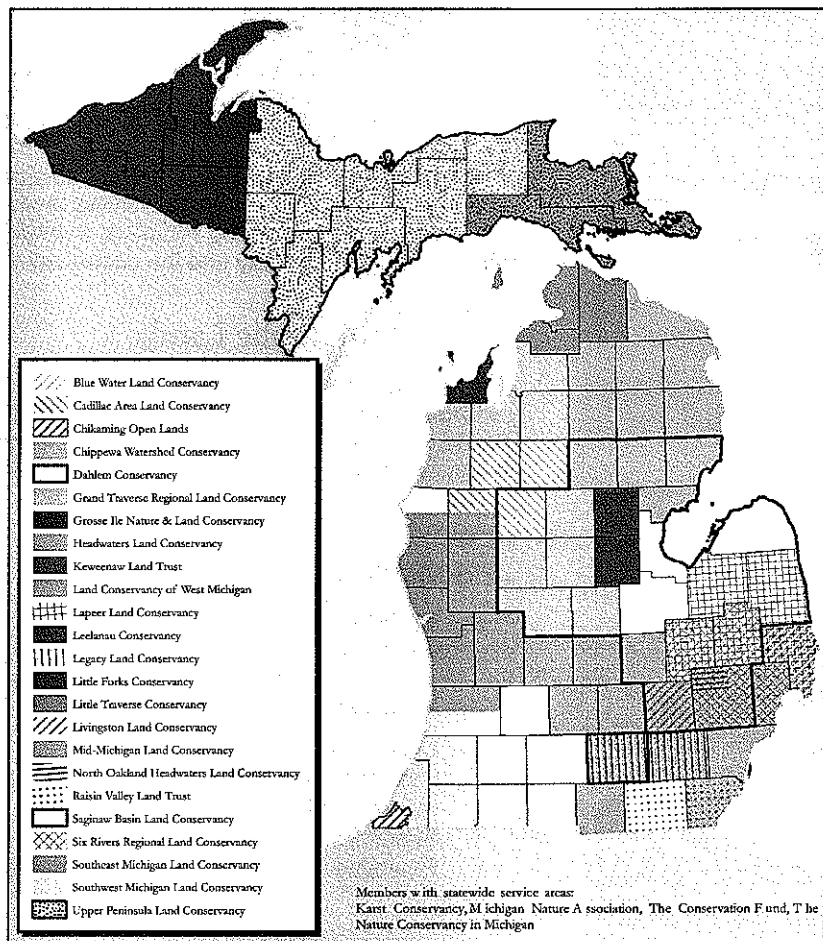
Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy

Heart of the Lakes is a statewide organization that represents and strengthens the collective efforts of land conservancies and conservation organizations.

Heart of the Lakes provides leadership, support services, and advocates for smart public policy for the benefit of our communities and for Michigan's future.

Uniting Michigan Land Conservancies

Founded by Michigan land conservancies, Heart of the Lakes does what no individual land conservancy can do on its own - it unites them under the common goal of protecting Michigan's critical lands.

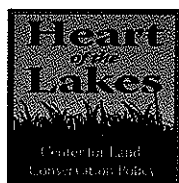


Shared Policy Priorities

Significant opportunities exist now to have a tremendous impact on water quality, farmland preservation and protection of Michigan's most biologically and recreationally important places. Michigan land conservancies are united around policy that supports the conservation of these vital spaces.

Michigan Land Conservancies are united around policies that:

- Support water quality protection through land preservation
- Support working farm and forest land protection
- Safeguard and increase public funds for land conservation
- Encourage tax incentives for private land conservation



Protecting our Natural Infrastructure



Michigan's Network of Land and Water

Michigan's 4.5 million acres of state lands, in addition to local and federal public lands, provide us with a bounty of recreational opportunities and scenic views as we travel the state. These lands are deeply embedded as part of the recreational landscape and cultural heritage of Michigan.



All Michigan citizens deserve access to our lakes, rivers, fields and forests. Steps should be taken now to secure strategic connections between these lands and waters. Linking the state's natural infrastructure will provide long term benefits: ready access to recreational users, continuous habitat and corridors for wildlife, increased biodiversity, secured water quality, and a protected agricultural base.



Biodiversity, Connectivity, and Statewide Health

Biodiversity is defined as the number or variety of species in an ecosystem. Maintaining high biodiversity is important for ecosystem health. Each plant and animal plays a role in the function and process of life. Protecting the ecosystems that these organisms live in protects our quality of life.

Providing connectivity between suitable habitat across a landscape allows organisms to move between populations and spread genetic diversity, increasing the "fitness" of the species as a whole. When suitable habitat becomes fragmented, populations are challenged to migrate, challenged to maintain their genetic diversity, and challenged to survive long term.

Ensuring a network of healthy lands and waters that support the state's biodiversity will ensure fit plant and animal populations and the ability for each to carry out its unique role in maintaining overall ecosystem health and thus, our quality of life.



Michigan Land Conservancies: Playing a Vital Role

Protecting a network of important lands and waters now will ensure our best chance at success in the future of Michigan's abundant land based resources.

Through strategic conservation planning and relationships with landowners and partners, conservancies are working to protect large, connected areas of forest, grassland, wetland and shoreline where high biodiversity exists.



The Opportunity is Now: Michigan's Conservation Investment

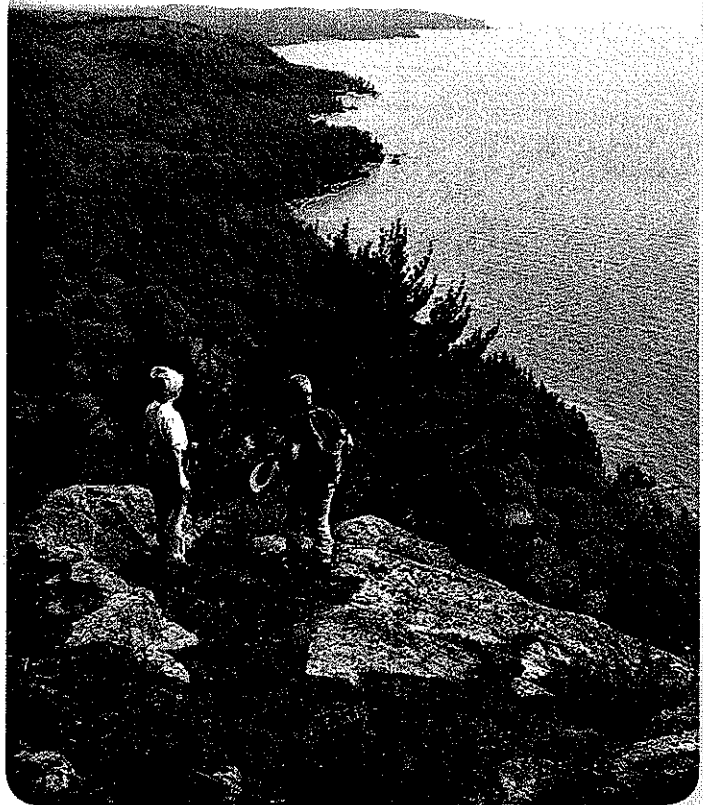
Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund

The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) is a constitutionally protected fund providing financial assistance to local governments and the State for the conservation of lands and development of public recreational opportunities. The MNRTF is supported by annual revenues from the development of state-owned mineral resources, largely oil and gas.

Due to the May 2010 record oil and natural gas lease auction, the MNRTF is anticipated to reach its \$500 million cap in 2011, causing revenues to begin flowing into the State Park Endowment Fund (SPEF) to pay for operations, maintenance, development, and land acquisition in state parks. Once the SPEF accumulated principal reaches \$800 million, revenues will begin flowing into the General Fund.

A Strategy for Michigan

Strategic discussions must take place to determine the way in which additional funds will be expended. We must ensure that Michigan leverages this important investment and opportunity to assess how future revenues could help to drive a statewide conservation strategic plan.



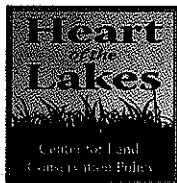
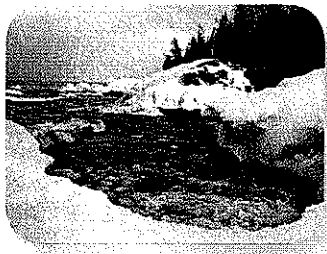
Recommended Actions

Build a statewide conservation vision

How do we want Michigan to look in 20, 50, 100 years? We must determine the conservation and policy actions needed now to achieve that vision and how to develop it along with a fundamentally new business plan for the state.

Call for an investment strategy for natural resources

Michigan needs to develop an investment strategy for the long-term preservation of our natural resources, which are critical to the economic future of our state. As the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund approaches its endowment cap and oil & gas revenues begin to flow into the State Park Endowment Fund, now is an opportune time to develop strategies to ensure future revenues support conservation. Heart of the Lakes aims to work collaboratively with other conservation organizations and the new administration to seek opportunities to leverage these funding sources for continued and expanded conservation and recreation opportunities.



Protecting Michigan's Water Resources

The Land-Water Connection

Michigan's land and water resource base are vitally important to the state's economy, to our quality of life and to the character of our environmental resources. Land conservancies play a critical role in waterway, coastal, and wetland protection and restoration, invasive species removal, and preservation of some of Michigan's most viable working lands. What we do on the land affects the quality and quantity of Great Lakes waters, its tributaries and surrounding wetlands through runoff and drainage.

Michigan Livelihoods Depend on the Land-Water Connection:

- Michigan's 10 million **citizens** rely on a safe and abundant source of drinking water
- **Farmers** grow over 120 types of crops in the state's varied soils and growing climates
- **The forest products industry** and recreational users contribute \$12 billion annually to Michigan's economy and provide 200,000 associated jobs
- **Recreational anglers**, 1.4 million resident and 318,000 nonresident, purchase licenses and contribute an estimated \$2 billion annually to our economy
- **Michigan's wetlands** provide habitat for wildlife and play a key role in maintaining water quality through filtration of pollutants and sediment



Land Conservancies: Protecting Land, Protecting Water

Michigan land conservancies act strategically in their protection and restoration efforts with a diversity of partnerships and funding sources to protect and restore lands that maintain regional and Great Lakes water quality. Examples include:

Michigan Dune Alliance

A partnership of Michigan conservancies focusing on Michigan's west coast received Sustain Our Great Lakes funding to conduct surveys, invasive species control, and monitoring of threatened coastal wetlands and forests along a 505-mile Lake Michigan shoreline.

Paw Paw River Watershed

A partnership between The Nature Conservancy, Michigan Nature Association, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, local and state government, landowners, and MSU, has strategically assessed and protected 2,000 acres (and counting!) of public and private land.

Arcadia Marsh and Bowen's Creek

A partnership between Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, and partners to restore coastal streams and wetlands in a fresh water estuary. Over 1/4 of the 16,000-acre watershed has been protected.

Bioreserve Project

A conservation effort to protect remaining natural areas within the Huron River Watershed. A Bioreserve Map identifies these areas to local government, landowners, and conservancies including Legacy, North Oakland Headwaters and Livingston Land Conservancies to help prioritize limited funding and preserve the most critical natural areas for water quality.

Michigan's Future: The Value of Strategic Conservation Planning

Strategic Conservation Planning

Land conservancies have a long history of protecting and restoring lands that impact Great Lakes waters. Conservancies use strategic conservation planning to identify and prioritize lands for future protection.

Clear Conservation Priorities

Spatial data resources help conservancies translate their conservation planning goals into on-the-ground success. Utilizing a variety of statewide and regional data, lands are analyzed to help conservancies work with landowners in achieving local and regional goals.

Informed Projects

Strategic conservation planning allows conservancies to protect land efficiently by creating a long term vision and setting clear priorities. It builds upon science-based decision making and takes into account social and economic priorities.

Strategic Partnerships

There is strength in numbers. Conservancies work with a diverse network of state, federal and nonprofit partners to address their shared conservation goals. Together, they protect and restore Michigan's water resources.

Long-Term Success

Heart of the Lakes is working with Michigan State University Institute of Water Research to focus land protection and restoration partnership efforts on lands contributing large amounts of sediment and contaminant loadings into waterways (Figure 1).

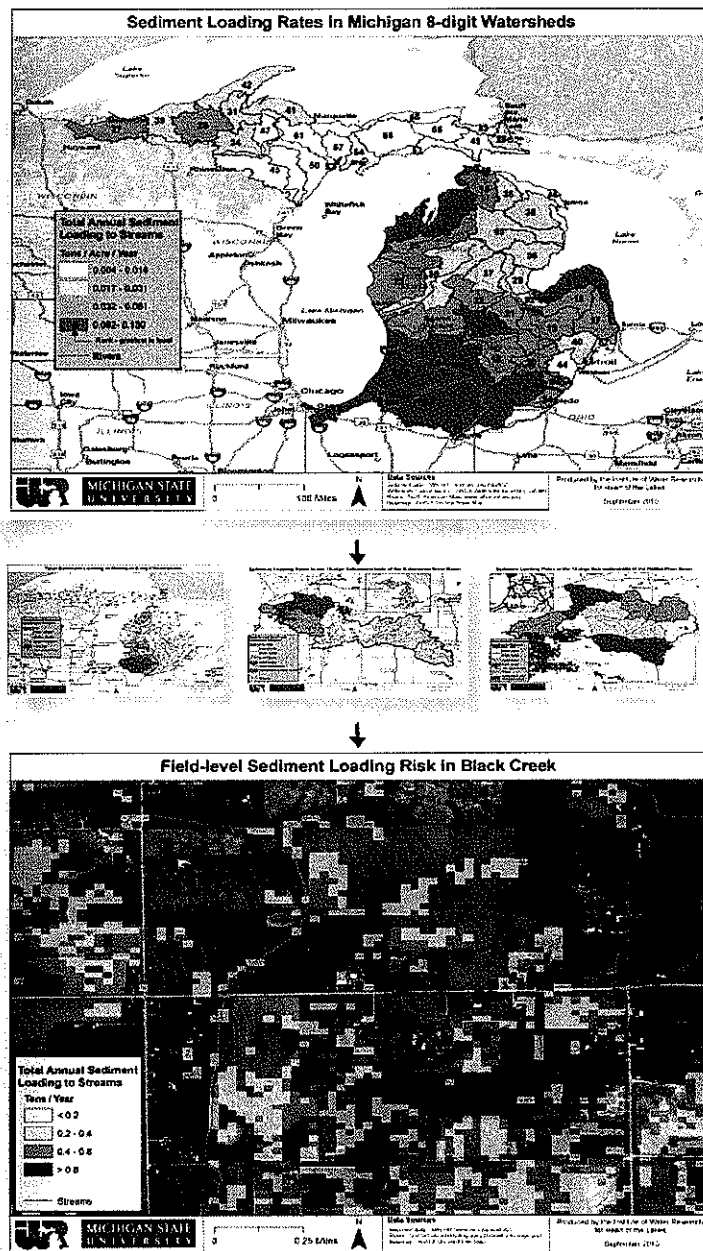


Fig. 1 MSU Institute of Water Research is helping land conservancies plan within a statewide context

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

Michigan land conservancies continue to engage in work that meets the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative's objectives. Statewide and regional conservation planning efforts have identified key areas that conservancies will continue working to protect and restore, ensuring healthy waters in surrounding lakes, streams, wetlands and our Great Lakes.

Heart of the Lakes and Michigan land conservancies continue to advocate for full appropriations annually proposed for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (\$465 million annually) so that conservancies and their partners can continue to plan and implement for permanent land protection, water quality, and water quantity.